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A REPORT OF PROGRESS OF THE COMMITTEES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL SCIENCE, N. E. A.

IN July 1895, at the Denver meeting of the N. E. A., the department of natural science was organized. At the Buffalo meeting, 1896, the executive committee of the department was instructed to take steps for the organization of a large national committee to consider the ways and means for improving the natural science work of high and preparatory schools, with special view to college requirements; this committee to have official connection as a branch of the "Committee of Ten" of the N. E. A. To this end invitations were extended to the following associations to nominate each a set of five representatives, one each in physical geography, physics, chemistry, biology (or zoölogy), and botany. The associations are the New England Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools, the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools of the Middle States and Maryland, the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, the Southern Association of Colleges, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the Department of Natural Science, N. E. A. Each of these responded with more or less promptness. Representatives of all the associations met with us at Milwaukee in 1897. Very hurried and incomplete meetings were held, and the following names were selected and officially appointed to serve, each as chairman of the persons representing his respective subject, viz.: physics, Professor Edwin H. Hall, Cambridge, Mass. (Harvard); chemistry, Professor Alexander Smith, Chicago, Ill. (University of Chicago); zoölogy, Professor Herbert B. Ward, Lincoln, Neb. (University of Nebraska); botany, Professor John M. Coulter, Chicago, Ill. (University of Chicago); physical geography, Professor A. P. Brigham, Hamilton, N. Y. (Colgate University).

There was some comment because, in the full list of the various committees, by far the larger number of names were from colleges, the high and preparatory schools having but slight representation; it was therefore voted that the representation from each association should be doubled, thus giving one college and one high school man in each specialty.

This task was attempted and has been partly accomplished; it is hoped that the full set of names of the "Committee of Sixty" can be published shortly. But much delay has been experienced, and several lessons have been learned. *Firstly*, it is impossible to get a large, unwieldy committee to work together—or indeed to work at all *as a committee*. They will not all gather at any one place—indeed they will hardly answer letters; but, *secondly*, the attempt to organize such a large, unwieldy committee has resulted in catching, as with a large drag net, the names of the *few* genuine, able enthusiasts in their special subjects.

Thus, although it has taken several years, we have this to report, viz., the picking out of a small set of earnest, capable men, selected from a really national representation, and now getting well organized for the real work for which all this trouble has been taken. It goes without saying that the committee is organized to work on indefinitely until they shall accomplish something definite and valuable. The committee will make a report in 1898 at Washington. This report cannot be final, for they have not yet had an opportunity to communicate with all of the names in their respective specialties, these having not yet been given in full to the corresponding secretary. But the men now serving are men to be trusted with the work. They will find that it takes time to know what is best to be done; that it takes more time to bring about a harmonious and practically unanimous adjustment of the claims and rights of the various specialties, and that it takes still more time to effect the adoption and accomplishment of the ideal courses, when they shall have been defined and coordinated, not only with each other, but also with the languages, mathematics, history, English, etc., which must appear in all preparatory courses.

Therefore let us be patient and give the committee all the time they need. It has taken an immense amount of labor and planning to bring them together. Let us not ask for any premature, ill-considered, snap-judgment report. They represent institutions of many types and varying characteristics from all parts of the country.

It is feared that this tedious report may seem at first glance to speak no progress and to call merely for more time without reason. It is not so. A great fermentation is going on. We are all changing our views more or less rapidly, and any report that the committee could give now would probably not satisfy us in a year. Let us therefore all wait a little, and meanwhile let us all prepare our minds to help the committee.

It is not for any of us to dictate to the committee in any way, nor to anticipate their special and combined reports; but it may not be inappropriate to discuss briefly some of the tendencies of the times which the committee are sure to meet as they continue their work; tendencies which they must inevitably consider if they would shape their reports for the greatest permanency of value; and these same tendencies we must all consider if we would prepare ourselves for the reports as they shall appear.

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